

*Special Supplement to Sight and Sound*

INDEX SERIES No. 17

AN INDEX  
TO THE FILMS OF  
JOSEF VON STERNBERG

By  
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*Edited by*  
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FEBRUARY, 1949

The author wishes to acknowledge with thanks the kindness of Miss Ona Munson, Mr. Hans Dreier, Mr. Paul Ivano, and Mr. Robert Florey for their granting of interviews and providing heretofore inaccessible material.

He also wishes to thank Miss Berry Franklin and Miss Barbara Blake, of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences Library, for their co-operative and very helpful assistance with source notes.

He wishes further to express his indebtedness to the lectures given by Todt von Sternberg at the University of Southern California, and to thank Mr. von Sternberg for his kindness in checking the manuscript.

C. H.

*"To know what to reveal, and what  
to conceal, is the secret of art."*

—JOSEF VON STERNBERG.

An intense awareness of light and shadow, as the very substance of cinema, is the basis from which all the films of von Sternberg spring. His cutting and approach to sound have often been as creative as his use of the camera. Throughout his career there has been a constant striving toward an original, formalistic approach to the problems of film creation. These are the aesthetic criteria which have dominated his work: in his most highly developed and individual films he has created an entire world, an almost unreal world created for the senses, a unique "von Sternbergian" world. This is closely related to his deep appreciation of painting as an art. Although he considers the cardinal points of cinematography similar to painting, he is fully aware of their point of departure—motion. Paul Ivano, von Sternberg's photographer on *The Sea Gull* and *The Shanghai Gesture*, considers him the "only director who knows what he wants to see on the screen". Von Sternberg knows *how* to light a set; his abilities are those of a fine craftsman as well as a creative artist. He considers the face of the actor as he would a landscape, and lights it accordingly. He is continually concerned with an absolute control over the lighting of a set. This has led him to photograph many of his films entirely on stages, producing to a certain extent the same effect as the German films during their period of superb studio craftsmanship in the early and mid-twenties. Such films create an entirely different atmosphere than those photographed at least partly in natural or open-air settings. To assure a maximum of reflected light he has sprayed trees with aluminium (in *The King Steps Out*), and painted many of his sets entirely white. The latter has allowed him to control the light and dark of a set entirely with its illumination, a method particularly noticeable in *The Case of Lena Smith*, *The Scarlet Empress*, *The Devil is a Woman* and *The Shanghai Gesture*.

In composing each shot, one of his most important considerations has been to "emotionalize" the dead space between the foreground and background. He has used countless pictorial devices to accomplish this, such as snow, dust, steam, the moving camera, a judicious use of telling objects in the foreground, etc.

Von Sternberg's treatment of the actor fits in closely with his pictorial sense. He considers the correct choice of the actor (usually from a pictorial point of view) as one of the most important phases of film production. And correct casting must be followed by an imposition of the director's will on the actor to make him fit in with the character and rhythm of his creation.

He welcomed the arrival of sound while others lamented the passing of the silent film. He was at last able to control his sound instead of being at the mercy of haphazard "musical accompaniments". He feels that sound and camera should be equal, integral partners in film creation. Sound may reinforce the visual image or become a counterpoint to it. Von Sternberg would like to use sound no more realistically than the visual image ("nothing is concealed in speech; the camera conceals a great deal"). By a creative use of sound an international film might be produced with an individual, dubbed-in track for each country.

What emerges finally from von Sternberg's credo, i.e., the director's absolute control over his materials leading to an organic synthesis of sound, image, and cutting, is the conception that the most important resultant in film is its ultimate abstraction. Although he has many further ideas as to the potentialities of the motion picture as a creative medium, von Sternberg believes, contrary to a hopeful younger generation of film students, that film has reached its arpeggio, that it will not improve with time. He considers film making "a commercial profession which uses tools that might be used for the creation of an art".

Josef von Sternberg was born on May 29, 1894, in Vienna. At the age of seven he was brought to New York for the first time, returning to Vienna and emigrating again frequently.

In 1914 von Sternberg entered the film business as a film patcher for the World Film Company in New York. Shortly before World War I he became chief assistant to William

A. Brady, director general of the World Film Company. Then he entered the Signal Corps of the Army, serving as a motion picture expert in Washington, D.C., during the war.

In the following years he became successively a film cutter, editor, writer, and assistant director, working with Lawrence Windom, Emil Chautard, Wallace Worsley, Roy William Neil, and others, in the United States and England.

Early in 1924 von Sternberg met George K. Arthur, a young English actor who had been having difficulty getting a start in Hollywood. Arthur had an idea for a comedy upon which he suggested von Sternberg collaborate. But von Sternberg countered this with a script called *The Salvation Hunters*, and soon sold Arthur on the idea of making it. Together they managed to raise enough money to begin:

### THE SALVATION HUNTERS. (1925.) Released by United Artists, February 15, 1925.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Original scenario by Josef von Sternberg. Photographed by Edward Gheller. A Josef von Sternberg Production released by Academy Pictures and distributed by United Artists.

#### Cast:

<i>The Boy</i>	...	...	...	...	...	George K. Arthur
<i>The Girl</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Georgia Hale
<i>The Child</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Bruce Guerin
<i>The Man</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Otto Matiesen
<i>The Woman</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Nellie Bly Baker
<i>The Brute</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Olaf Hytten
<i>The Gentleman</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Stuart Holmes

*Synopsis:* "Three derelicts live on a mud scow from which circumstances and environment release them after poetically conceived tribulations". (J. v. S.)

Made for only \$4,800, von Sternberg's first directorial effort already gave ample evidence of his basic approach to film making, the approach that was to continue throughout his career. The simple story served as an outline in which the emphasis was placed on the revealing pictorial composition: in this case images used to heighten the atmosphere of sordidness in the environment of the characters. The "hero" of the film was a mud-dredging machine, whose shadow became a psychological symbol, haunting the lives of the characters, while everywhere one felt the mud, the filth, the ugliness of the young people's existence. It was one of the earliest fictional films with a documentary-like quality. The performance of Georgia Hale<sup>1</sup>, the leading lady, was especially singled out as being quite unusual in its lack of obvious gestures. Since the only "name" actor in the film, Stuart Holmes, charged one hundred dollars a day for his services, and the low budget would hardly allow for such extravagance, von Sternberg hired him for one day only—and the next day played his shadow. The major part of the film was photographed at the San Pedro, California, mud flats. Upon the film's completion, George K. Arthur, with the help of Arthur Reeves, Chaplin's business manager, interested Chaplin in the venture. Chaplin saw it, officially sent out his hallowed approval of the film, and Douglas Fairbanks and Joseph Schenck proceeded to purchase part of it for twenty thousand dollars, for release through United Artists. Max Reinhardt said of it, "It is inconceivable that such cinematic greatness could have been achieved in America". Largely a *success d'estime*, it served to launch the directorial career of von Sternberg, bringing his talent to the attention of producing companies able to give him further work.

With his first film sold for distribution through United Artists, in October, 1924, von Sternberg left for Pittsburgh under contract to Mary Pickford to write a story for her against the industrial background of that city. However, upon his return, Miss Pickford had a disagreement with him and supplanted him with Marshall Neilan as director for her next film. The Pittsburgh story was dropped.

Von Sternberg next went to M.G.M., where he had been previously contracted to go upon the expiration of the Pickford contract. There he made:

<sup>1</sup> Miss Hale's first film. She later became Chaplin's leading lady in *The Gold Rush*.

**THE EXQUISITE SINNER.** (1926.) Released by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, March 28, 1926.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Based on the novel by Alden Brooks. Adapted by Josef von Sternberg and Alice D. G. Miller. Photographed by Maxmillian Fabian.

*Cast:*

<i>Dominique Prad</i>	...	...	...	...	Conrad Nagel
<i>The Gypsy Maid</i>	...	...	...	...	Renée Adoree
<i>Yvonne</i>	...	...	...	...	Paulette Duval
<i>Colonel</i>	...	...	...	...	Frank Currier
<i>Colonel's Orderly</i>	...	...	...	...	George K. Arthur
<i>The Gypsy Chief</i>	...	...	...	...	Mathew Betz
<i>Dominique's Sisters</i>	...	...	...	...	{ Helene D'Algy Claire Dubrey

*Synopsis:* A wealthy boy runs away from home to be with the gypsies. His family and fiancée keep trying to get him to return, but he finally stays with a wild, rough gypsy girl.

In the version released this film was selected by the National Board of Review as one of the forty best pictures of 1926.

Von Sternberg's second film for M.G.M. was to have been *The Masked Bride*, starring Mae Murray. After the first few days' shooting, von Sternberg turned his camera to the ceiling, shot the rafters as a gesture of what he thought of his assignment, and walked off the set. The film's direction was given to Christy Cabanne, the von Sternberg-Metro contract was broken by mutual consent, and von Sternberg left for a vacation in Europe.

Upon his return he went under contract to Charles Chaplin to direct a film intended to bring Edna Purviance<sup>2</sup> out of retirement:

**THE SEA GULL.** (1926.) (*The Woman of the Sea.*) Unreleased.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Original screenplay by Josef von Sternberg. Photographed by Paul Ivano. Sets by Danny Hall. Produced by Charles Chaplin.

*Cast:*

Edna Purviance, Eve Southern, Gane Whitman.

A simple, quadrangular love story served as the basis for this film in which the changing patterns of the sea were used for psychological and atmospheric underscoring of the action, photographed largely on the sea coast of Monterey, California. Paul Ivano became officially a first cameraman on this film, due to von Sternberg's confidence in his ability. Although the film was previewed once, in Beverly Hills, Chaplin decided, for reasons of his own, not to release it.

With a history of three relatively unsuccessful films behind him, the only position next offered to von Sternberg was that of assistant director to Art Rossen at Paramount. He accepted the job, and was next assigned to directing re-takes on Frank Lloyd's *Children of Divorce*. The success of these re-takes spurred B. P. Schulberg's<sup>3</sup> confidence in him. Schulberg offered von Sternberg the direction of:

**UNDERWORLD.** (1927.) Released by Paramount, September 3, 1927.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Original story by Ben Hecht. Adapted by Charles Furthman. Scenario by Robert N. Lee. Photographed by Bert Glennon. Sets by Hans Dreier. Titles by George Marion, Jr.

*Cast:*

<i>"Rolls Royce"</i>	...	...	...	...	Clive Brook
<i>"Feathers" McCoy</i>	...	...	...	...	Evelyn Brent
<i>"Bull" Weed</i>	...	...	...	...	George Bancroft
<i>"Slippy" Lewis</i>	...	...	...	...	Larry Semon
<i>Buck Mulligan</i>	...	...	...	...	Fred Kohler
<i>Mulligan's Girl</i>	...	...	...	...	Helen Lynch
<i>Paloma</i>	...	...	...	...	Jerry Mandy

<sup>2</sup> Chaplin's leading lady in many of his early comedies, and the star of the comedian's one serious directorial effort, *A Woman of Paris*.

<sup>3</sup> Then production head of Paramount Pictures.

*Synopsis:* Big-time gangster "Bull" Weed helps out drunkard "Rolls Royce", who falls in love with "Bull's" girl, "Feathers" McCoy. When "Bull" kills his rival, Buck Mulligan, he goes to prison. "Rolls Royce" and "Feathers", still loyal to "Bull", engineer his escape, but there is a slip-up at the last minute. "Bull" escapes anyway, thinking they've double-crossed him. While cornered by the police in his hide-out, "Rolls Royce" and "Feathers" come to rescue him by a secret passageway. "Bull", seeing that they really love each other, tells them to leave, and stays to fight it out.

One of the first and most popular of gangster films, *Underworld* served to establish the directorial abilities of von Sternberg on the sort of basis most respected in Hollywood: it became an enormous box-office success. Considered generally to be one of the best films of that year, the studio awarded it a \$10,000 bonus for being the most successful picture shown at the N.Y. Paramount Theatre during 1927. For the first time von Sternberg concentrated on making a commercial success; he brought to Ben Hecht's tightly-knit plot an excellent feeling for characterization, a strong sense of realism, and an economy of means in telling the story. The film emerged as a compact, taut melodrama. George Bancroft's portrayal of the big-hearted gangster was outstanding. In 1927 the whole vernacular of gangsterism was new to the screen, and von Sternberg's film was the most original and effective of the period.

During the next three years at Paramount von Sternberg directed five films, wrote an original story, *The Street of Sin*, which was made into a film directed by Mauritz Stiller with Emil Jannings, and worked on the cutting of Erich von Stroheim's *The Wedding March*.

#### **THE LAST COMMAND. (1927-28.) Released by Paramount, January 23, 1928.**

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. From an original story by von Sternberg, based on an incident told by Ernst Lubitsch to Lajos Biro. Scenario by John S. Goodrich. Sets by Hans Dreier. Photographed by Bert Glennon. Titles by Herman J. Mankiewicz.

*Cast:*

<i>Sergius Alexander</i> ...	...	...	...	Emil Jannings
<i>Natacha</i> ...	...	...	...	Evelyn Brent
<i>Leo</i> ...	...	...	...	William Powell
<i>The Adjutant</i> ...	...	...	...	Nicholas Soussanin
<i>Serge, the Valet</i> ...	...	...	...	Michael Visaroff

*Synopsis:* Jannings, an ageing extra in Hollywood, is chosen to play the general in a battle scene. Actually he is a former White Russian general, and in a flashback the story of his experience in the Russian revolution is told. In the end, the illusion that he is once again the powerful general is too much for him, and he dies while enacting a scene so reminiscent of his former triumphs.

*The Last Command* served primarily as a vehicle for the acting virtuosity of Emil Jannings, then at the height of his popularity. Here the director used the moving camera quite freely, particularly in the opening scenes at the studio, while the studio details contributing to a sense of reality and atmosphere were carefully worked out, with considerable pungent humour. Von Sternberg's increasing interest in woman as a sensual personality was apparent in his direction and photographic treatment of Evelyn Brent. This was the first film in which von Sternberg used rather frequently the slow lap-dissolve, a device which was to become a characteristic of the director's later films.

#### **THE DRAG NET. (1928.) Released by Paramount, May 26, 1928.**

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. From the story, "Nightstick", by Oliver H. P. Garrett. Adaptation and screenplay by Jules Furthman. Photographed by Harold Rosson. Sets by Hans Dreier. Titles by Herman J. Mankiewicz.

*Cast:*

"Two-Gun" Nolan	...	...	...	George Bancroft
"The Magpie" ...	...	...	...	Evelyn Brent
"Dapper" Frank Trent	...	...	...	William Powell
"Gabby" Steve ...	...	...	...	Fred Kohler
"Sniper" Dawson ...	...	...	...	Francis McDonald
Donovan ...	...	...	...	Leslie Fenton

*Synopsis:* Detective Lieutenant "Two-Gun" Nolan is trying to run Trent's gang of hi-jackers out of town. Trent's moll, "Magpie", admires Nolan's strength and asks him to join the gang. He refuses. One night Nolan is called to a house to help out Donovan. He is fired at and just after he fires back Donovan's body falls at his feet. Under the impression that he has killed him, Nolan turns to drink, until "Magpie" arranges to let him hear Trent boast about the killing. In the ensuing fight Nolan kills Trent and his gang wounds "Magpie". They get together in the hospital.

In this attempt to duplicate the success of *Underworld*, von Sternberg further demonstrated his unique ability to make a fast-moving melodramatic thriller. The story material of *The Drag Net* did not quite equal that of the previous film, and by the time it was released, the gangster theme had already begun to pall slightly. However, it was still a very successful film, evincing on the part of von Sternberg an extensive use of pictorial detail. Kohler's restaurant was an elaboration of the *Underworld* cafe, and Miss Brent appeared again in feathers, this time augmented with two-coloured furs and a striking black and white skull-cap. A party sequence using much confetti and serpentine for effect was once again in evidence, and the cobwebbed tenement was a picturesque example of the director's feeling for the pictorial value of the sordid.

#### THE DOCKS OF NEW YORK. (1928.) Released by Paramount, September 29, 1928.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. From a story suggested and adapted by Jules Furthman. Photographed by Harold Rosson. Sets by Hans Dreier. Titles by Julian Johnson.

##### Cast:

<i>Bill Roberts</i> ...	...	...	...	...	George Bancroft
<i>Sadie</i> ...	...	...	...	...	Betty Compson
<i>Lou</i> ...	...	...	...	...	Olga Baclanova
"Sugar" <i>Steve</i> ...	...	...	...	...	Clyde Cook
<i>Third Engineer</i> ...	...	...	...	...	Mitchell Lewis
" <i>Hymn Book</i> " <i>Harry</i> ...	...	...	...	...	Gustav von Seyffertitz
<i>Steve's Girl</i> ...	...	...	...	...	Lillian Worth

*Synopsis:* Bancroft, a simple coal-stoker, rescues a girl from suicide and as a drunken joke marries her. The next morning he is returning to the ship when he sees a crowd and police gathering. He returns to find the girl being arrested for shooting the third engineer, who had tried to force his attentions on her. The engineer's wife then confesses to the shooting and Bancroft once more leaves. On an impulse, he swims ashore to find his wife arrested for possessing stolen clothing. He confesses to the crime and is sentenced to sixty days. The girl, to whom the marriage means her only chance for respectability, says she'll wait for him.

*The Docks of New York* again provided von Sternberg with a picturesque setting, and a group of colourful, underworld characters. He made the most of the opportunities thus offered him, and brought forth one of his most totally effective silent films. For the first time since *The Sea Gull*, he concentrated strongly on the pictorial possibilities of his story; the fog, the glistening bodies of the stokers, the low-life settings, were rendered in a rich chiaroscuro. He had two new actresses to work with, Olga Baclanova and Betty Compson, and he used them in contrast to each other with the utmost effect. Baclanova, particularly, emerged as a striking filmic personality in a role which perfectly suited her. Bancroft gave his customary strong performance. The settings reminded one at times of *Greed*, but von Sternberg's soft-focus, rather caressing lighting lent them a glamour and feeling quite unlike von Stroheim's harsh, bitter work.

#### THE CASE OF LENA SMITH. (1929.) Released by Paramount, January 19, 1929.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. From an original story. Screenplay by Jules Furthman. Photographed by Harold Rosson. Sets by Hans Dreier.

##### Cast:

<i>Lena Smith</i> ...	...	...	...	...	Esther Ralston
<i>Franz Hofrat</i> ...	...	...	...	...	James Hall
<i>Herr Hofrat</i> ...	...	...	...	...	Gustav von Seyffertitz
<i>Frau Hofrat</i> ...	...	...	...	...	Emily Fitzroy
<i>Stefan</i> ...	...	...	...	...	Fred Kohler

<i>Stefan's Sister</i>	...	...	...	...	Betty Aho
<i>Commissioner</i>	...	...	...	...	Lawrence Grant
<i>Janitor</i>	...	...	...	...	Alex Woloshin
<i>Janitor's Wife</i>	...	...	...	...	Ann Brody

*Synopsis:* With a prologue and epilogue laid during World War I, the main section of the story takes place in Vienna in 1894. A peasant girl goes from her native village to Vienna, where she secretly marries a profligate army officer, bears him a child, and becomes a servant in his father's home. When the father attempts to take her child she exposes him as a tyrant.

Made in the transitional period from silence to sound, *The Case of Lena Smith*, like certain other silent films at that time, was obscured in the furore created by the arrival of the new addition to the film medium; it failed to receive the attention that it deserved. Von Sternberg's ever-growing concentration on the pictorial gave the story a strongly atmospheric quality. The milieu of the Vienna of the period in which the story was laid was accurately, admirably captured. For the first time von Sternberg painted a dark set white for photographic purposes. Among the many beautiful sequences in the film, Lena's escape through the misty corn-fields stood out as an especially beautiful study in light and shade. The moving camera was used effectively in several sequences; especially memorable was the director's use of a rushing camera movement to follow Lena's tumultuous arrival in the workhouse. The opening amusement park sequence, with its distorted mirror images and the beautifully lighted boat journey through the tunnel of horrors gave further evidence of von Sternberg's increasing pictorial mastery. Generally well received by the more perceptive critics, *The Case of Lena Smith* may be regarded as von Sternberg's most successful attempt at combining a story of meaning and purpose with his very original style.

**THUNDERBOLT.** (1929.) Released by Paramount, June 22, 1929.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. From an original story by Jules and Charles Furthman. Adapted by Charles Furthman. Dialogue by Herman J. Mankiewicz. Sets by Hans Dreier.

*Cast:*

"Thunderbolt"	...	...	...	...	George Bancroft
<i>Bob Moran</i>	...	...	...	...	Richard Arlen
"Ritz"y	...	...	...	...	Fay Wray
<i>Warden</i>	...	...	...	...	Tully Marshall
<i>Mrs. Moran</i>	...	...	...	...	Eugenie Besserer
"Snapper" O'Shea	...	...	...	...	James Spottswood
"Bad Al" Frieberg	...	...	...	...	Fred Kohler
"Kentucky" Sampson	...	...	...	...	Mike Donlin
<i>Negro Convict</i>	...	...	...	...	S. S. Stewart
<i>Bank Officer</i>	...	...	...	...	George Irving
<i>Priest</i>	...	...	...	...	Robert Elliott
<i>Police Inspector</i>	...	...	...	...	William Thorne
<i>District Attorney</i>	...	...	...	...	E. H. Calvert

*Synopsis:* Learning that his girl friend, "Ritz"y, is in love with honest young Bob Moran, "Thunderbolt", notorious gangster, is on his way to kill the boy when he is arrested. Later, "Thunderbolt's" gang frame Moran on a murder charge, and he lands in a cell opposite "Thunderbolt". Four hours before Moran is to go to the death chamber, "Thunderbolt" confesses that he framed him. "Thunderbolt" still plans his revenge by his intention to strangle the boy just before he himself goes to the death chamber, but he softens at the last moment with his hand an inch from the boy's neck. The door of the execution chamber closes behind him.

In his first sound film von Sternberg once again directed George Bancroft in a tightly-knit gangster story. The last half of the film took place in the cell-block of a prison presided over by a neurotic warden, effectively played by Tully Marshall. The dialogue by Herman Mankiewicz was realistic, although there tended to be too much of it. Music was used only where it would naturally occur, in the "black-and-tan" cafe sequence, and as played by the jail quartet and band. This time von Sternberg was not inspired to pictorial virtuosity. This was von Sternberg's last essay in the direction of his first great success, *Underworld*, until ten years later, when he made *Sergeant Madden*.

Upon the completion of *Thunderbolt* von Sternberg left for Germany to make a film for UFA under the production guidance of Erich Pommer.<sup>4</sup> This was *The Blue Angel*, made in both English and German dialogue versions. The English version was not released in the United States until after von Sternberg's later, American-made *Morocco*. Thus, Marlene Dietrich was first introduced to American audiences in *Morocco*, closely followed by:

**THE BLUE ANGEL.** (1930.) A UFA production. Released by Paramount, January 3, 1931.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. From the novel "Professor Unrath" by Heinrich Mann. Adapted by Carl Zuckmayer and Karl Volmoeller. Continuity by Robert Liebmann. Scenario: Liebmann and Zuckmayer. Photographed by Gunther Rittau and Hans Schneeberger. Sets by Otto Hunte. Music by Friedrich Hollander. Edited by Sam Winston. An Erich Pommer Production for UFA. Songs: "Nimm Dich In Acht Vor Blonden Frauen", "Ich Bin Von Kopf Bis Fuss Auf Liebe Eingestellt", "Ich Bin Die Fesche Lola" and "Kinder, Heut' Abend Such Ich Mir Was Aus". (Lyrics to songs by Robert Liebmann.)

*Cast:*

<i>Professor Immanuel Rath</i>	...	...	Emil Jannings
<i>Lola Frohlich</i>	...	...	Marlene Dietrich
<i>Kiepert, a Magician</i>	...	...	Kurt Gerron
<i>Guste, his Wife</i>	...	...	Rosa Valetti
<i>Mazepa</i>	...	...	Hans Albers
<i>Principal of the School</i>	...	...	Eduard von Winterstein
<i>The Clown</i>	...	...	Reinhold Bernt
<i>The Beadle</i>	...	...	Hans Roth
<i>Angst</i>	<i>Scholars</i>	...	Rolf Mueller
<i>Lohmann</i>		...	Roland Varno
<i>Ertzum</i>		...	Karl Balhaus
<i>Goldstaub</i>		...	Robert Klein-Loerk
<i>The Publican</i>	...	...	Karl Huszar-Puffy
<i>The Captain</i>	...	...	Wilhelm Diegelmann
<i>The Policeman</i>	...	...	Gerhard Bienert

*Synopsis:* A middle-aged school teacher, a strict disciplinarian, falls completely in love with a fetching cabaret singer whom his students have been sneaking away to see. It leads to his being dropped from the faculty, their marriage, and his reluctant selling of suggestive postcards of his wife in the cafe where she sings. During the next five years he descends to appearing as a clown, mimicking a rooster while eggs are smashed on his head. When the troupe plays the town in which he formerly taught he goes mad as he sees his wife in the wings in the arms of another man. Crowing like a rooster, he attempts to strangle her, but is restrained. Desperately, he stumbles back to his old schoolroom, the symbol of his former pride and dignity as a man. There, embracing his old desk, he dies.

The novel by Heinrich Mann (brother of Thomas Mann), upon which the picture was based, provided a character perfectly suited to the talents of Jannings; von Sternberg and his writers freely adapted the literary work to fit the director's filmic requirements. In his search for an actress to play the role of Lola, von Sternberg came across Marlene Dietrich appearing in a short comedy, Georg Kaiser's "Zwei Kravatten", on the stage of the Berliner Theatre. Although she had played previously in *Princess Ohlala* (1927), *I Kiss Your Hand, Madame* (1928), and with Fritz Kortner in *The Ship of Lost Men* (1929), and Kurt Bernhardt's *Three Loves* (1929), she had not been particularly noticed, and she had more or less given up the idea of a film career. In an interview several years later Dietrich described this period: "Von Sternberg found me in Germany. I was nothing there. He believed in me, worked with me, trained me—he gave all his knowledge, experience and energy to make me a success . . . He made me over". And thus arrived one

<sup>4</sup>"This was at the request of Emil Jannings who wanted von Sternberg to direct his first sound-film in Germany. It was to have been about Rasputin, but von Sternberg did not care for the subject and there were legal complications, so Jannings suggested Heinrich Mann's 'Professor Unrath'. Only the first two-thirds of the story were used. (In the original, the Professor goes on to become an important social figure, despite his experience with Lola.)"—H. G. W.

of the most outstanding film personalities ever to reach the screen. Not since Garbo had such a furore been created by the arrival of a new star. *The Blue Angel* was an immediate, international success, and Dietrich became world famous literally overnight. Featuring an extremely intelligent and imaginative use of sound when most pictures were still talky and stilted, *The Blue Angel* had numerous long passages without speech, and the music and songs blended easily with the continuity. The English language version cleverly established legitimate excuses for the use of a foreign language, as, of course, the members of the cast spoke with a German accent; Jannings played the role of an English professor who required that his pupils speak in English, and Dietrich was supposed to be British. Fully conscious of the atmospheric and dramatic value of carefully used natural sounds, von Sternberg effectively employed church-clock chimes, playing a popular German tune praising loyalty and honesty, to accompany the arrival of the professor each morning promptly at eight to his classroom. They are heard once again as an ironic note to accompany his ignoble and pitiful end. When Jannings stumbles through the snow during his final return to the schoolroom, an off-shore foghorn of the port town sounds mournfully. Friedrich Hollander's songs contributed much; Dietrich's forceful rendition of the running theme, "Ich Bin Von Kopf Bin Fuss", astride a chair, was particularly memorable. The elaborate settings, usually small and loaded with detail, served to fill the screen continuously with dark, sensuous compositions. Reminiscent of the detail in von Stroheim's *Greed*, here the use of inanimate objects was much more stylized, giving one the feeling that reality had been acutely extended, projected imaginatively beyond its natural limits. Here was the first developed example of the unique von Sternbergian world that was to reach its high-point of realization five years later in *The Devil is a Woman*.

**MOROCCO.** (1930.) Released by Paramount, December 6, 1930.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. From the play "Amy Jolly" by Benno Vigny. Scenario and dialogue by Jules Furthman. Photographed by Lee Garmes. Edited by Sam Winston. Sets by Hans Dreier. Songs: "Give Me the Man" by Leo Robin and Karl Hajos, "What Am I Bid for My Apples?" by Robin and Hajos, "Quand L'Amour Meurt" by Cremieux.

*Cast:*

<i>Tom Brown</i> ...	...	...	...	...	...	Gary Cooper
<i>Amy Jolly</i> ...	...	...	...	...	...	Marlene Dietrich
<i>LaBessiere</i> ...	...	...	...	...	...	Adolphe Menjou
<i>Adjutant Caesar</i> ...	...	...	...	...	...	Ulrich Haupt
<i>Anna Dolores</i> ...	...	...	...	...	...	Juliette Compton
<i>Corporal Tatoche</i> ...	...	...	...	...	...	Francis MacDonald
<i>Colonel Quinnevieres</i> ...	...	...	...	...	...	Albert Conti
<i>Mme. Caesar</i> ...	...	...	...	...	...	Eve Southern
<i>Lo Tinto</i> ...	...	...	...	...	...	Paul Porcasi

*Synopsis:* Amy Jolly, a cafe singer, falls in love with French Foreign Legionnaire Tom Brown. Wealthy LaBessiere also proposes to Amy Jolly, and she accepts, when the young soldier goes off to rejoin his regiment. On the night of the dinner announcing their engagement, Amy Jolly hears the legionnaires returning from an expedition. She runs out to find Tom Brown and finally discovers him in an Arabian cafe; he pretends that he no longer cares for her and leaves. She then discovers her name carved in the table where he had been sitting. The next day, as the legionnaires leave once again for the desert, she follows with the little group of native women who make up the "rear guard", those who follow their men despite all hardship.

Dietrich's first American film once again displayed von Sternberg's admirable ability to combine sound and image with the utmost effect. Throughout the film *only natural sounds were used*, psychologically and realistically to heighten effect. The lack of background music in this and others of von Sternberg's early sound films gave them a sharp, immediate quality; the director was able to sustain the emotional flow of a sequence without the use of music as a crutch. The staging of the two songs sung by Dietrich, one in English and the other in French, was particularly boldly handled. It is doubtful whether the actions accompanying the French song, with Dietrich dressed in a tuxedo, would pass the censors today; although, as in the case of many subtle intimations in the von Sternberg films of the early sound period, the vast majority would miss the import of the scene any-

way. For the first time slatted shutters were used on the Moroccan sets, and in the majority of von Sternberg's future films, whether the setting was laid in China, New Orleans, Russia, or Spain, these same slatted shutters and doors were to be seen. They became a very conscious pictorial device, used by the director in the creation of his particular filmic environments.<sup>5</sup> Again, there was a rich use of detail: the cluttered dressing room and apartment of Amy Jolly, the streets of Morocco filled with the complex light patterns made by the sunlight filtering through overhanging vines and lattices. Using the lap-dissolve sparingly, von Sternberg achieved an extraordinarily evocative effect by dissolving both sound and image very slowly as in the transition from the hospital to the Arabian cafe. The perhaps overly-romantic story served its purpose; it provided a smoothly flowing continuity in which the director's concern with the abstract considerations of film form became increasingly apparent.

**DISHONoured.** (1931.) Released by Paramount, April 4, 1931.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Original story by Josef von Sternberg. Screenplay by Daniel N. Rubin. Photographed by Lee Garmes. Sets by Hans Dreier.

*Cast:*

X27 ...	...	...	...	...	Marlene Dietrich
Lieutenant Kranau...	...	...	...	...	Victor McLaglen
Colonel Kovrin ...	...	...	...	...	Lew Cody
Secret Service Head	...	...	...	...	Gustav von Seyffertitz
General Von Hindau	...	...	...	...	Warner Oland
Young Lieutenant ...	...	...	...	...	Barry Norton
Court Officer ...	...	...	...	...	Davison Clark

*Synopsis:* X27, a streetwalker employed by the Austrian government, unmasks a Russian spy, but he escapes. Later she recognizes Lieutenant Kranau, posing as an Austrian, as the escaped Russian spy, and she lays a trap for him but he escapes again. When she goes to Russia, disguised as a peasant, Kranau captures her and they fall in love. But she drugs him and escapes. When he is finally captured, she identifies him and asks to be allowed to speak to him alone. She then lets him escape, her love being greater than her dedication to her country. She is executed as a traitor.

For Dietrich's second American film von Sternberg wrote an original story, laid in his native Vienna. Pictorially the film was an extension of his two previous works. Dietrich's Viennese apartment was cluttered with detail, and the actress herself appeared now in more elaborate costumes than before, featuring much veiling, feather boas and hats, monkey fur, etc. The headquarters of the Austrian secret service was made picturesque by having an enormous table covered with test tubes and other chemical paraphernalia set in the centre of the room. The star appeared in a number of different guises during the film; she wore heavy leather flying togs in the plane sequence, and as the peasant her face was shiny with no make-up. The costume ball,<sup>6</sup> in which von Sternberg once again used serpentine for its pictorial effect, was richly photographed, anticipating slightly the opening carnival sequence in *The Devil is a Woman*. Music was sparingly but effectively used, as in the piano playing of Ivanovici's "Danube Waves", and slow lap-dissolves of both sound and image were increasingly in evidence. Victor McLaglen gave a fairly capable performance under von Sternberg's close direction, although he was actually rather miscast. In his stressing of the abstract visual elements of character and situation, von Sternberg has not always been successful in establishing the emotional relationship between two players. In this case the supposedly great affection between the two leading characters failed to be convincing enough to the audience to warrant the sacrifices they made. This lack of warmth gave the story a certain arbitrariness. There had been complaints from some critics that the highly romantic ending of *Morocco* strained credibility. The ending of *Dis-*

<sup>5</sup> "Von Sternberg was asked by the Pasha of Marakech in Cannes when he (von Sternberg) was in Morocco shooting the film, as the Pasha could not recall the filming of the picture there. When von Sternberg told him that the film was shot entirely in California, the Pasha was amazed at the veracity of the Moroccan atmosphere in the film. Sternberg had never been in Morocco."

"All of Sternberg's films, whether set in Africa, Russia, China or Spain, are *evocations* of those places, rather than realistic pictures of those locales. This was done intentionally, as an impressionist painter does the same thing intentionally".—H. G. W.

<sup>6</sup> "The costume ball gave an impression of hundreds of merry-makers when, as a matter of fact, there were ten extras used for this scene. Von Sternberg cleverly employed hundreds of balloons and serpentine streamers to give an illusion of a crowded ballroom".—H. G. W.

*honoured*, while effective enough as melodrama, was similarly romantic, with Dietrich pausing to rouge her lips while a love-crazed young lieutenant refused to issue the order to fire.<sup>7</sup>

### AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY. (1931.) Released by Paramount, August 22, 1931.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. From the novel by Theodore Dreiser. Adaptation by von Sternberg and Samuel Hoffenstein. Screenplay by Samuel Hoffenstein. Photographed by Lee Garmes.

#### Cast:

<i>Clyde Griffiths</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Phillips Holmes
<i>Roberta Alden</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Sylvia Sydney
<i>Sondra Finchley</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Frances Dee
<i>Orville Mason</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Irving Pichel
<i>Samuel Griffiths</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Frederick Burton
<i>Mrs. Samuel Griffiths</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Claire McDowell
<i>Gilbert Griffiths</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Wallace Middleton
<i>Myra Griffiths</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Vivian Winston
<i>Belknap</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Emmett Corrigan
<i>Mrs. Asa Griffiths</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Bodil Rosing
<i>Jephson</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Charles B. Middleton
<i>Titus Alden</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Albert Hart
<i>Mrs. Alden</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Fanny Midgely
<i>Bella Griffiths</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Arline Judge
<i>Bertine Cranston</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Evelyn Pierce
<i>Judge</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Arnold Korff
<i>Jill Trumbell</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Elizabeth Forrester
<i>Coroner Fred Heit</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Russell Powell
<i>Earl Newcomb</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Imboden Parrish
<i>Deputy Sheriff Kraut</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Richard Kramer

*Synopsis:* Young Clyde Griffiths, from a poor family, is going with Roberta Alden when he meets rich girl Sondra Finchley. He wants to give up Roberta, but she is pregnant. Reading in the paper about a girl accidentally drowned while out boating, Clyde takes Roberta out in a boat with the intention of killing her. He decides not to do it, but she is accidentally drowned anyway. He is brought to trial and convicted of murder.

Von Sternberg's interpretation of Theodore Dreiser's long and exhaustive social novel was neither a critical nor popular success in the United States, although it was a great success in Europe. Dreiser sued Paramount for being unfaithful to the original, and lost the verdict. When Paramount first purchased the novel, Sergei Eisenstein had just arrived from Russia, and he was assigned to do a treatment on the story. If Eisenstein's remarkable treatment had been filmed, there would probably have been no complaints from anyone, except, perhaps, the exhibitors to whom the artistic film is box-office anathema, for his treatment was a faithful adaptation of the story to a dynamic film continuity. However, the Paramount officials decided to entrust the filming to a more reliable and tested source, and so Samuel Hoffenstein, in collaboration with von Sternberg, wrote a new script. The complexities and social implications of the novel were only noted in passing, and von Sternberg gave the story a more factual interpretation.<sup>8</sup>

### SHANGHAI EXPRESS. (1932.) Released by Paramount, February 12, 1932.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Based on a story by Harry Hervey. Screen play by Jules Furthman. Gowns by Travis Banton. Photographed by Lee Garmes. Sets by Hans Dreier.

<sup>7</sup>"Some of the greatest love poems ever written are idiotic when analyzed in the light of truth and realism. It's the poetry that counts".—H. G. W.

<sup>8</sup>"Von Sternberg, in conversations with Dreiser, told him that he was not interested in the so-called social implication of Dreiser's story as he did not believe in it. A young man, even from a better environment than Clyde Griffiths', could conceivably get himself into the same difficulty. Besides, to retain Dreiser's implications would be to blame religion and missionary workers for murder.

"During this period, Eisenstein and von Sternberg were close friends".—H. G. W.

*Cast:*

<i>Shanghai Lily</i>	...	...	...	...	Marlene Dietrich
<i>Captain Donald Harvey</i>	...	...	...	...	Clive Brook
<i>Hui Fei</i>	...	...	...	...	Anna May Wong
<i>Henry Chang</i>	...	...	...	...	Warner Oland
<i>Sam Salt</i>	...	...	...	...	Eugene Pallette
<i>Mr. Carmichael</i>	...	...	...	...	Lawrence Grant
<i>Mrs. Haggerty</i>	...	...	...	...	Louise Gossler Hale
<i>Eric Baum</i>	...	...	...	...	Gustav von Seyffertitz
<i>Major Lenard</i>	...	...	...	...	Emile Chautard

*Synopsis:* On a train journey from Peiping to Shanghai, *Shanghai Lily*, notorious white prostitute, meets an old flame, Captain Harvey. The train is stopped by revolutionists led by Henry Chang, and Captain Harvey is held as a hostage. *Shanghai Lily* agrees to stay with Chang when he threatens to torture Harvey, but Chang is finally killed and the train continues its journey. Not knowing of her sacrifice, Harvey considers her desire to stay with Chang one more example of her faithlessness, until the train arrives in Shanghai and he learns the truth.

With *Shanghai Express* von Sternberg turned out one of his greatest popular successes. Dietrich's popularity reached its peak with the release of this film. The relatively few characters involved were all meticulously etched, the settings were highly atmospheric, and the whole produced a very pleasing unity of effect. Given the problem of making a train a dramatic and striking element in the film, von Sternberg painted an Asiatic style train white and used gold Chinese lettering on the sides. The Chinese setting was mainly established by including a sequence in which the train puffed out of Peiping, through an impossibly narrow street crowded with animals and people, while overhead hung hundreds of oriental banners.<sup>9</sup> The revolutionary headquarters was carefully designed to give von Sternberg ample and varying textures for photographic virtuosity. Seen once again were slatted doors and windows, overhead lattice-work, and a stairway and balcony which provided various levels for action. The latter pictorial device was to be developed further. Natural sounds were used exclusively until the final sequence, which blossomed forth as a delightfully rhythmic, purely cinematic denouement. Upon the arrival of the train in Shanghai, a jazz score accompanied the debarkation of the various characters, and the eventual coming together of the two principals in their fade-out kiss. In her three previous films Miss Dietrich's legs had been so much in evidence that both critics and the public had begun to comment upon von Sternberg's obsession with them. In *Shanghai Express* she appeared in long skirts throughout. The actions and speeches of the two principals were unusually slow at times; they had obviously been "directed" to fit in with the measured tempo of the film. Of the innumerable striking photographic compositions in the film, two of the most memorable were the dark, net-draped room where Chang was stabbed by Hui Fei, and the long close-up of Dietrich's hands clasped in prayer. It is in this, the ability to suggest the inner emotional experience merely with a control of light and shadow, that von Sternberg excels.

**BLONDE VENUS.** (1932.) Released by Paramount, September 16, 1932.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Screenplay by Jules Furthman and S. K. Lauren. Photographed by Bert Glennon. Sets by Wiard Ihnen. Songs: "Hot Voodoo" and "You Little So and So" by Sam Coslow and Ralph Rainger. "I Couldn't Be Annoyed" by Leo Robin and Dick Whiting.

*Cast:*

<i>Helen Faraday</i>	...	...	...	...	Marlene Dietrich
<i>Edward Faraday</i>	...	...	...	...	Herbert Marshall
<i>Nick Townsend</i>	...	...	...	...	Cary Grant
<i>Johnny Faraday</i>	...	...	...	...	Dickie Moore
<i>Ben Smith</i>	...	...	...	...	Gene Morgan
<i>"Taxi Belle" Hooper</i>	...	...	...	...	Rita La Roy
<i>Dan O'Connor</i>	...	...	...	...	Robert Emmett O'Connor
<i>Detective Wilson</i>	...	...	...	...	Sidney Toler

<sup>9</sup> "Von Sternberg was told he'd be arrested if he ever went to China, after making this film. When he did go to China, shortly afterwards, he was warmly received."

"He had never been to China before making *Shanghai Express* and was uninterested in a 'realistic China'. He wanted only to evoke China on the screen in deft, brief strokes".—H. G. W.

**Synopsis:** Helen Faraday comes from the Berlin stage to the modest New York flat of her American husband, a research chemist whose health is in danger from radium poisoning. To provide money for a cure she becomes the mistress of wealthy Nick Townsend. Later her husband finds out and threatens to take their child. She then runs away with the child and goes from town to town, first as a cabaret singer, then as a prostitute, always leaving a few hours before the Missing Person's Bureau locates her. She finally returns her child to her husband, and then sinks deeper and deeper, eventually turning up in Paris, a music hall sensation. From Paris to New York and reconciliation.

There were several effective song sequences in this film, particularly the "Hot Voodoo" number, in which Dietrich wore a fantastic blond "fuzzy-wuzzy" wig, and emerged startlingly from the hairy ugliness of an ape-skin. As an increasingly exotic and visually striking beauty, Dietrich's loveliness had never before been so fully exploited by her director. Bert Glennon's photography was exceedingly rich. Some of the exteriors were taken by Paul Ivano. Perhaps the most notable aspect of this film was its revelation of a von Sternbergian America, a cinematic environment quite unlike the real country, somewhat European in feeling, but mostly a unique, imaginative projection of the thematic material at the director's disposal (*i.e.*, The South, a Flophouse, a Night Club, a Chemist's Apartment, etc.). The illogical ending, with Dietrich's sudden unexplained rise from a flophouse in the South to stardom in a Paris music hall robbed the already banal story of its final shred of credibility.

In November, 1932, von Sternberg left by American Clipper for the West Indies with photographer Paul Ivano to gather background shots for a proposed circus story to star Dietrich. Primarily searching for a hurricane to photograph, they were unsuccessful and von Sternberg left for an extended sojourn in Europe.

In July, 1933, Dietrich left for a vacation in France. Shortly afterward von Sternberg returned to the United States from Germany. Dietrich's contract called for more films, and von Sternberg was signed, upon Dietrich's request, once again to direct them. On October 12, 1933, a screen play based on a diary of Catherine the Great was completed by Manuel Komroff. Dietrich returned from Europe and on October 23, 1933, shooting began on:

**THE SCARLET EMPRESS.** (1934.) Released by Paramount, September 7, 1934.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Based on a diary of Catherine the Great. Screen play by Manuel Komroff. Decorations by Hans Dreier and staff headed by Peter Ballbusch and Richard Kollorsz. Titles and effects by Gordon Jennings. Costumes by Travis Banton. Musical score based on Tschaikowsky and Mendelssohn arranged by John M. Leipold and W. Frank Harling. Photographed by Bert Glennon.

*Cast:*

<i>Sophia Frederica</i>	...	...	...	Marlene Dietrich
<i>Catherine II</i>	...	...	...	
<i>Count Alexei</i>	...	...	...	John Lodge
<i>Grand Duke Peter</i>	...	...	...	Sam Jaffe
<i>Empress Elizabeth</i>	...	...	...	Louise Dresser
<i>Catherine as a child</i>	...	...	...	Maria Sieber
<i>Prince August</i>	...	...	...	C. Aubrey Smith
<i>Countess Elizabeth</i>	...	...	...	Ruthelma Stevens
<i>Princess Johanna</i>	...	...	...	Olive Tell
<i>Gregory Orloff</i>	...	...	...	Gavin Gordon
<i>Lieut. Ovitsyn</i>	...	...	...	Jameson Thomas
<i>Ivan Shuvalov</i>	...	...	...	Hans von Twardowski
<i>Archimandrite Simeon Tevedovsky</i>	...	...	...	Davison Clark
<i>Arch-Episcopé</i>	...	...	...	

**Synopsis:** Sophia Frederica is brought from Germany to Russia to become the wife of the mad Grand Duke Peter. At first innocent and wondering, when she is married and plunged into the intrigue of the decadent court she gradually hardens and, with the aid of some of the guards, overthrows the Grand Duke and triumphantly takes the throne.

As if von Sternberg had suddenly decided to expend all his efforts toward an abso-

lutely uncompromising development of his filmic theories, *The Scarlet Empress* emerged as a remarkable advance, aesthetically, over his previous films. He had always fought for independence and the freedom to follow his own wishes in making his films. Now in a position to do as he pleased, he took full advantage of it. Seen today, *The Scarlet Empress* has an almost unbelievable quality about it, for it is difficult to imagine any producer, especially in Hollywood, allowing such a film to be made. Despite any adverse criticism that may be directed toward it, and there has been a great deal, it remains one of the most completely unique experiences in the cinema repertoire, achieving an extraordinary visual impact. In designing the sets suggestive of the tremendous Peterhof Palace in the Eighteenth Century, von Sternberg used walls of logs as a background to twisted, anguished sculptures of saints and martyrs. Contrary to any number of speculations as to their symbolical meaning, these grotesque figures were merely intended as decorative art. Peter Ballbusch, a Swiss sculptor who later became head of the montage department at M.G.M., executed, with the help of a large staff, two hundred individual statues in four weeks. Richard Kollorsz, a German painter, executed the ikons and portraits in the Byzantine style. Von Sternberg built his sets simply as visually suggestive backgrounds, rather than attempting to duplicate the true Peterhof Palace. Thus, the idea for the use of logs as the walls of the castle came when Hans Dreier discovered an old etching showing a Russian building of the period built of logs. With a number of log-covered flats, each new set was easily constructed by re-arranging the flats and adding a few statues. To achieve a quality of massiveness, von Sternberg made one huge door out of the customary tall double doors seen in palaces of the period, and their apparent heaviness was emphasized when several ladies-in-waiting could be seen employing all their strength to swing one of them open.

In form *The Scarlet Empress* was an attempt to devise a pictorial movement having its counterpart only in a symphony. The various sequences of the film could be likened to a scherzo, a rondo, an andante, etc. In his by now all-engrossing concern with achieving his effects purely by visual means, von Sternberg resorted to titles to inform the audience of the actual historical progress of Catherine. Telling the story with speech was by now a lesser concern than ever before, and it was as if every once in a while the visual embellishments of the theme had to be interrupted to let the audience know what, exactly, was transpiring. However, once Catherine arrived at the palace, the titles became fewer, and the events of Catherine's gradual development from an innocent young girl into a shrewd and worldly woman were told almost entirely in a breathtakingly beautiful sequence of magnificent photographs. The memorable Russian Orthodox wedding ceremony was executed with a marvellous feeling for the barbaric and fantastic quality of ritual. In his masterful uniting of photography, music, and rhythmic cutting, von Sternberg achieved an extraordinary totality of effect. That this and the rest of the film was entirely the product of one man's creative control over the multiple crafts that go into film making becomes evident when one sees the scenario from which the film was shot. In it there is no hint of the final film; only a small amount of Komroff's dialogue, and the general continuity of events were followed. Filled with detail, one remembers the cabinet filled with clocks, the locket falling from branch to branch of the barren tree, the crazy Duke boring holes in the wall of his wife's bedroom to peek in at her, Catherine blowing out the candles in her room, Catherine, achieving motherhood in her huge bed toying with a piece of veiling, and finally the stirring climax with Catherine riding with her horsemen *through the castle* to claim her throne. Much of the picture became a sort of hymn to the visual loveliness of Miss Dietrich. All this fantastic splendour became overpowering; at times the actors seemed quite lost. The critics said that the actors were unable to compete with the settings. Although this may be partially true, both Dietrich and her leading man, John Lodge, in his first important role, emerged rather strongly in the almost completely stylized manner of their performances. Dietrich played the young Empress with wide eyes, mouth slightly open, little make-up. As she grew increasingly cynical her actions changed in tempo to fit her developing character. It appeared that an attempt had been made, not always successful, to augment the nightmarish quality of the settings with the stylized performances of the actors. Although von Sternberg had more or less tried this before, at no time had he been more completely justified or successful. Sam Jaffe, in his first film, recently arrived from playing Kringelein in the Broadway production of "Grand Hotel", gave an excellent portrayal of the mad Duke, well in keeping with the atmosphere of the whole, although

he reminded many too much of Harpo Marx, with his pop-eyes and touselled blond hair. Louise Dresser seemed miscast as the Empress Elizabeth. Her voice introduced a jarring note to the whole. As one reviewer commented, "she sounded like a fish-wife calling out her wares amid a group of quiet, cultured Europeans", but this was the effect von Sternberg desired. Mention should be made of the careful integration of film rhythm and the musical score which ran throughout the film. At many moments it gave the impression of being a film dance, so abstract and rhythmic were many of the sequences. Perversely, *The Scarlet Empress* was released to a cold critical reception. It has been rumoured that Paramount never made back the negative cost.

The next vehicle chosen for Dietrich was Pierre Louys' "Femme et le Pantin", a story which had been made into a film once before in 1920 with Geraldine Farrar and Lou Tellegen. Von Sternberg at first called his film "Caprice Espagnol". The title was finally changed by Ernst Lubitsch, then production head of Paramount, to:

**THE DEVIL IS A WOMAN.** (1935.) Released by Paramount, May 3, 1935.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Adapted for the screen by John dos Passos. From the story "Woman and Puppet" by Pierre Louys. Continuity by Sam Winston. Music by Ralph Rainger and Andrea Setaro. Lyrics by Leo Robin. Costumes by Travis Banton. Art Direction: Hans Dreier. Photographed by Josef von Sternberg, assisted by Lucien Ballard. Song: "Three Sweethearts Have I" by Leo Robin and Ralph Rainger.

*Cast:*

"Concha" Perez	...	...	...	...	Marlene Dietrich
Don Pasqual	...	...	...	...	Lionel Atwill
Antonio Galvan	...	...	...	...	Cesar Romero
Don Paquito	...	...	...	...	Edward Everett Horton
Senora Perez	...	...	...	...	Alison Skipworth
Morenito	...	...	...	...	Don Alvarado
Dr. Mendez	...	...	...	...	Morgan Wallace
Tuerta	...	...	...	...	Tempe Pigott
Maria	...	...	...	...	Jil Dennett
Conductor	...	...	...	...	Lawrence Grant
Letter Writer	...	...	...	...	Charles Sellon
Gypsy Dancer	...	...	...	...	Luisa Espinal
Foreman Snowbound Train	...	...	...	...	Hank Mann
Superintendent Tobacco Factory	...	...	...	...	Edwin Maxwell

*Synopsis:* During carnival time in Seville, Antonio, looking for a woman with whom to spend his time, sees Concha riding in a carriage. He throws her a note and an assignation is arranged. Before he goes to see her he meets Don Pasqual; when Antonio mentions Concha, Don Pasqual warns him that she is a dangerous woman, and has ruined him. He tells about how he met her, how he has been a slave to her ever since, and how she has been continually unfaithful. However Antonio goes to see her anyway, and later when Don Pasqual finds them together a duel is precipitated. Don Pasqual is wounded, and Antonio asks Concha to go to Paris with him. At last moment Concha returns to Don Pasqual.

It seemed inevitable that as long as von Sternberg continued to direct Marlene Dietrich he should one day turn to the work of the erotic writer, Pierre Louys, for material upon which to base a film. In Louys' "Femme et le Pantin" he found a leading character and a sequence of events perfectly suited to the talents of Dietrich and his exotic style of filming. Following the first part of the original almost exactly, Dos Passos' scenario elaborated on the theme during the last half of the story, providing a great wealth of incident for the film. The denouement devised by von Sternberg, in which the suspense was artfully maintained until the last possible moment, remains one of the most sardonic and insidious ever to be put on film. During its making von Sternberg stated: "We have progressed as far as possible together. My being with Miss Dietrich any further will not help either her or me. If we continued we would get into a pattern which would be harmful to both of us". Although it was announced that von Sternberg was attempting to duplicate in *The Devil is a Woman* some of the qualities of his earlier films that had made them so successful with the public, he actually carried his experiments with visual abstraction to an even further point of development than in *The Scarlet Empress*. The only element that could be likened to the popular features of his earlier

work were two song sequences, one of which was cut out just before the film's release. In *The Scarlet Empress* the story line had been carried along by explanatory titles. In his new film the main part of the story was narrated, in flashback, by Don Pasqual, as in the Pierre Louys original. It assumed its own momentum finally when the story of Concha reached the present moment in the life of the narrator and his listener. In one of the few successful examples of flash-back film narrative, von Sternberg was once again free to embellish pictorial incident; each sequence was carefully designed, each camera set-up perfectly lighted and composed. Dietrich, in a striking new characterization, totally dissimilar to her "Catherine" in the previous film, appeared more beautiful than ever in the lavish Spanish costumes designed for her by Travis Banton. In a performance again highly stylized, the sadistic nature of Concha was brilliantly conveyed. Lionel Atwill stood out as her ageing lover, contributing a subtle, well-balanced portrayal, in perfect contrast to the dynamic personality of his *vis-à-vis*. Cesar Romero, in a part primarily requiring a handsome appearance, registered effectively in one of his first large roles. Joel McCrea, originally cast as "Antonio", walked out after a few days' shooting, announcing that all the spontaneity was being directed out of him. Edward Everett Horton provided almost the only humour in the film with his customary comic skill. His portrayal was carefully integrated into the structure of the story. So often in the case of films of a serious nature, when it is felt that a certain amount of "comedy relief" must be provided, the character added to furnish the humour is a completely extraneous element, injurious and often rather embarrassing to the work as a whole. Von Sternberg throughout his career has largely avoided this pit-fall. At times, however, his oblique and highly individual sense of humour has not impressed itself very well on film (i.e., the bartender in *The Shanghai Gesture*, and certain vagaries of humour in *The Scarlet Empress*.)

The Spanish settings were outstanding examples of studio craftsmanship. Hans Dreier had always collaborated very sympathetically with von Sternberg, assisting the director greatly in the exact realization of his aims. In *The Devil Is A Woman* an imaginary Spain was constructed expressly for von Sternberg's camera; here the slatted shutters, which had first been used in *Morocco*, appeared once again, carefully worked into the colourful reconstruction of a Spanish town at the turn of the century. Painting the sets white allowed von Sternberg to splash light and shadow here and there at his will. Using lattices and nets and various other devices to achieve varying patterns of light, almost every shot in the picture had an individual distinction. The tobacco factory and cafe made brilliant use of various stair and balcony levels for pictorial effect, and the early train sequence was filled with evocative detail. The musical score employed Rimsky-Korsakoff's "Caprice Espagnol" as thematic material; the rhythmic qualities of the film were carefully integrated with the music. An example of von Sternberg's now more frequent attempt to abstract the film from its human element could be seen in his use of elaborate full-faced masks of goats, dwarfs, devils, etc., in the opening carnival sequence.

*The Devil Is A Woman* received a critical reception even colder than that accorded *The Scarlet Empress*, although all remarked about its great physical beauty. Approximately five months after it had been released, word was received that the Spanish government objected to the film on the grounds that it portrayed the Civil Guard as a subject for comedy. On October 31, 1935, the Spanish Minister of War, Gil Robles, announced that all Paramount films would be barred from Spain unless *The Devil Is A Woman* were withdrawn immediately from world circulation. The matter then went into the hands of the U.S. State Department, and by November 12th they concluded negotiations for Paramount to fulfil her existing contracts for the film and withdraw it. A commercial treaty being planned at that time between the United States and Spain was rumoured as the reason for the quick capitulation to the unreasonable demands.<sup>10</sup> Entitled "Susceptibilité Excessive," an article in "Intercine" commented, "L'Espagne de von Sternberg n'était et n'a jamais été l'Espagne: c'était un pays imaginaire, un pays de conte, une espèce de paradis artificiel et romantique peuplé des fantasmes carnavalesques et d'amours impossibles. . . . Pourquoi ce féroce autodafé? . . .".

<sup>10</sup> "The negative was burned, though several prints still exist. Sternberg mentions that he saw *The Devil is a Woman*, at a private screening, fairly recently.

"With the exception of *The Salvation Hunters*, still his favorite film, he regards *The Devil is a Woman* as the most completely realized of his works, although he was dissatisfied with them all. Viviane Romance is scheduled to play Concha in a forthcoming French version of 'Woman and Puppet'".—H. G. W.

Von Sternberg next went to Columbia where B. P. Schulberg had gone earlier. There he once again directed under Schulberg's production guidance:

**CRIME AND PUNISHMENT.** (1935.) Released by Columbia, November 20, 1935.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. From the novel by Fyodor Dostoevsky. Screenplay by S. K. Lauren and Joseph Anthony. Photographed by Lucien Ballard. Music by Louis Silvers. Art Direction: Stephen Goossens. Costumes by Murray Mayer. Edited by Richard Calhoon. Produced by B. P. Schulberg.

Cast :

<i>Inspector Porfiry</i>	...	...	...	...	Edward Arnold
<i>Raskolnikov</i>	...	...	...	...	Peter Lorre
<i>Sonya</i>	...	...	...	...	Marian Marsh
<i>Antonya</i>	...	...	...	...	Tala Birell
<i>Mrs. Raskolnikov</i>	...	...	...	...	Elizabeth Risdon
<i>Dmitri</i>	...	...	...	...	Robert Allen
<i>Grilov</i>	...	...	...	...	Douglass Dumbrille
<i>Lushin</i>	...	...	...	...	Gene Lockhart
<i>The University President</i>	...	...	...	...	Charles Waldron
<i>The Editor</i>	...	...	...	...	Thurston Hall
<i>The Clerk</i>	...	...	...	...	Johnny Arthur
<i>The Pawnbroker</i>	...	...	...	...	Mrs. Patrick Campbell
<i>Landlady</i>	...	...	...	...	Rafaelo Ottiano
<i>Painter Prisoner</i>	...	...	...	...	Michael Mark

*Synopsis:* Raskolnikov, a poor student, owing rent, worried lest his sister marry for money, seeks to pawn his watch. He finds that the pawnbroker's greed is forcing a young girl into the streets; seeing this, all his growing resentment is suddenly centred upon the pawnbroker. He murders him, and another is accused of the crime. Immediately afterwards he becomes successful, and earns money from his writing; his crime appears pitifully unnecessary now, and his conscience finally impels him to confess.

Von Sternberg's second attempt to adapt a well-known literary work to the screen proved more successful than his first; although his treatment still suffered in comparison to the tortured original, the film itself turned out to be more successful, more suggestive of Dostoevsky's novel than his attempt to bring Dreiser's work to the screen. Most of the inner complexities of the novel were removed in the screen adaptation of *Crime and Punishment*; what resulted was a clever murder melodrama, with most of the burden for giving the character of Raskolnikov the significance of the original resting upon the performance of Peter Lorre. Certain redundancies and discrepancies were apparent, faults mostly inherent in the script. There were moments when Lorre seemed unlikely to have come from the same family as his sister and mother, so different from them did he seem. Marian Marsh bore a definite resemblance to Dietrich, especially in the manner of her performance. Comparison with the French film version of the story (directed by Pierre Chenal with Pierre Blanchard), released at the same time, were inevitable. Most critics seemed to prefer the French adaptation as more accurately capturing the spirit of the original, although there were exceptions. The settings of von Sternberg's film were once again carefully designed, with slatted shutters and much textural detail. Von Sternberg completed shooting *Crime and Punishment* in the remarkably short time of only twenty-eight days.<sup>11</sup> Always desiring to keep as many as possible of the elements of film production under his immediate control, he demonstrated during the filming how much more quickly he could arrange a camera set-up, the lighting, and then direct the scene without a division of the labour involved. His efforts were timed, and he successfully proved his point. The Hollywood trade papers generally praised von Sternberg's excellent and judicious direction, while one commented, with *The Devil Is A Woman* and *The Scarlet Empress* still fresh in mind, "He has become a director again".

**THE KING STEPS OUT.** (1936). Released by Columbia, May 15, 1936.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. From the operetta "Cissy" by Herbert and Ernst Marischka based on a play "Cissy" by Ernst Decsey and Gustav Hohn. Screenplay

<sup>11</sup> "There's nothing remarkable about it. I don't like to shoot a long time".—J. v. S.

by Sidney Buchman. Photographed by Lucien Ballard. Music by Fritz Kreisler. Lyrics by Dorothy Fields. Musical score by Howard Jackson. Art Direction: Stephen Goossen. Ballet by Albertina Rasch. Costumes by Ernst Dryden. Associate director: Wilhelm Thiele. Produced by William Perlberg.

*Cast:*

<i>Cissy</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Grace Moore
<i>Franz Josef</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Franchot Tone
<i>Maximilian</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Walter Connolly
<i>von Kempen</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Raymond Walburn
<i>Palfi</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Victor Jory
<i>Sofia</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Elizabeth Risdon
<i>Louise</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Nana Bryant
<i>Helena</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Frieda Inescort
<i>Major</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Thurston Hall
<i>Pretzelberger</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Herman Bing
<i>Herlicka</i>	...	...	...	...	...	George Hassell
<i>Chief of Secret Police</i>	...	...	...	...	...	John Arthur

*Synopsis:* The young Emperor Franz Josef is betrothed to a princess. The princess' sister, disguised as a commoner, meets him one day and they fall in love. Through a ruse in identity brought about by the girl's father, true love finds its way.

One of Grace Moore's last films in Hollywood, *The King Steps Out* failed to live up to the precedent set previously by her very successful *One Night Of Love*. The latter was a series of songs held together by a slight story; von Sternberg's film turned out to be a story with songs rather awkwardly added. Von Sternberg had seen the original production of Fritz Kreisler's "Cissy" in Vienna, and was assigned to bring Miss Moore and Kreisler's music together in a film version. She reported later in her autobiography that she did not believe he knew what he was doing. Von Sternberg nevertheless managed to produce a handsomely mounted and artfully paced musical, in which the artificiality of the settings and characters contributed to a total effect of charming, romantic unreality. The interiors were mostly snow-white, the costumes colourful, and the trees, as in the case of *The Scarlet Empress*, were painted with aluminum again. Von Sternberg had the directorial collaboration of the Viennese Wilhelm Thiele, who had achieved fame with his direction of the popular German musical, *Drei von der Tankstelle*. Critics generally commented on Miss Moore's graceful emergence as a comedienne under von Sternberg's able direction, although a few (including von Sternberg) found her rather uneasy in the role. The story, based on the life of Elizabeth of Austria, seemed to have little to distinguish it from most operetta plots, and the characters were largely stereotyped. Walter Connolly, in his portrayal of the impoverished and beer-loving Bavarian duke, gave the most effective and memorable performance, while Herman Bing contributed a considerable amount of his special brand of comedy.

Upon the expiration of his contract with Columbia, late in 1936, von Sternberg left for England to make a film for Alexander Korda:

**CLAUDIUS.** (1936.) Uncompleted.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Photographed by Georges Perinal. Art Direction: Vincent Korda. From the novel "I, Claudius" by Robert Graves. Produced by Alexander Korda.

*Cast:*

Charles Laughton, Merle Oberon, Flora Robson, Robert Newton.

The reason officially announced for disbanding the production was an automobile accident sustained by Merle Oberon.<sup>12</sup>

While in England von Sternberg began preparations to make a film version of Zola's "Germinal" (which Pudovkin had also once planned to do), but this was abandoned when von Sternberg contracted a serious illness and he returned to the United States. At this time he was also offered a post by the Austrian Government to direct the govern-

<sup>12</sup> "As for *Claudius*, I had great difficulty in managing Laughton; so did Korda; and when Oberon had a bad concussion in an auto accident, which meant so much delay that all our preparations and contracts were invalidated, it was decided to halt the film. It might have been my most successful film. There was no other reason".—J. v. S.

ment's department of fine arts, but the advent of Hitler's *anschluss* with Austria made it impossible for him to accept.

In October, 1938, von Sternberg was contracted by M.G.M. on a one-picture agreement to direct a story entitled "New York Cinderella", intended as Hedy Lamarr's second American film. From an original by Charles MacArthur, the film was to co-star Spencer Tracy and Walter Pidgeon, and was photographed by Harold Rosson. After her sensational debut in *Algiers*, the American version of Duvivier's *Pepe le Moko*, which she made on loan-out to another studio, Hedy Lamarr proved to be M.G.M.'s greatest headache. They weren't quite sure what to do with her. Von Sternberg was probably chosen to direct her because of his memorable handling of Dietrich, and it is assuredly fascinating to consider how he might have treated the woman generally considered to be the most beautiful and exotic film personality since Dietrich. However, after only eighteen days of shooting, von Sternberg was removed because of a disagreement with production heads as to the manner in which the film was to be treated. Frank Borzage was hastily called in to replace von Sternberg and shooting continued; the title was then changed to *I Take This Woman*. When Borzage completed the film it was shelved. Finally, it was once again re-shot by W. S. Dyke, II, and released on February 2, 1940.

Meanwhile von Sternberg had completed his one-picture contract with M.G.M. by directing:

#### **SERGEANT MADDEN. (1939.) Released by M.G.M., March 24, 1939.**

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Based on the story, "A Gun In His Hand" by William A. Ulman. Screenplay by Wells Root. Photographed by John Seitz. Art Direction: Cedric Gibbons and Randall Duell. Montage effects by Peter Ballbusch. Music by Dr. William Axt. Produced by J. Walter Ruben.

##### *Cast:*

<i>Shaun Madden</i>	...	...	...	...	Wallace Beery
<i>Al Boylan, Jr.</i>	...	...	...	...	Tom Brown
<i>Dennis Madden</i>	...	...	...	...	Alan Curtis
<i>Eileen Daly</i>	...	...	...	...	Laraine Day
<i>Mary Madden</i>	...	...	...	...	Fay Holden
<i>"Piggy" Ceders</i>	...	...	...	...	Marc Lawrence
<i>Charlotte</i>	...	...	...	...	Marian Martin
<i>"Punchy"</i>	...	...	...	...	David Gorcey

*Synopsis:* Shaun Madden's son, overly anxious to distinguish himself in the same occupation as his father, resorts too readily to the use of firearms. A vengeful gangster frames the boy, and his father resigns from the force in shame. When the son escapes from a train bound for Sing Sing, he takes up a life of crime. Finally, in ultimate contrition, he permits himself to be killed by police bullets in order that his father, wife, and newborn child may be saved further disgrace.

For the first time in ten years von Sternberg returned to the milieu of his first great box-office success, *Underworld*. He treated *Sergeant Madden* with the same economy and simplicity that had characterized the earlier work, and turned out an able, if not particularly distinguished, film. Most noteworthy was von Sternberg's directorial handling of Wallace Beery, an actor long noted for his smirking facial contortions when faced with an embarrassing or dramatic moment; in this his annoying personal characteristics were subjugated to a refreshing character portrayal in a serious vein. In her first film, Laraine Day displayed talent and charm, registering quite effectively as the young wife. After a rather slow start, devoted to establishing the characters and background, the picture speeded up to a fast-moving, melodramatic finish. Pictorially the film had little to indicate the director's former concern with sensuous patterns of light and shadow; but here his subject matter impeded him to a more matter-of-fact treatment<sup>13</sup>.

In 1941, after a period of inactivity, Arnold Pressburger, a European film producer recently arrived as a refugee from France, contracted von Sternberg to direct the first film version of John Colton's lurid fifteen-year-old play:

<sup>13</sup> "Von Sternberg doesn't think very much of this opus, to put it mildly".—H. G. W.

## THE SHANGHAI GESTURE. (1941.) Released by United Artists, February 6, 1942.

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. From the play by John Colton. Adapted by Josef von Sternberg in collaboration with Geza Herczeg, Karl Vollmoeller and Jules Furthman. Photographed by Paul Ivano. Art Direction: Boris Leven. Set Decorations by Howard Bristol. Murals by Keye Luke. Edited by Sam Winston. Miss Munson's costumes by Royer. Miss Tierney's costumes by Oleg Cassini. Wigs by Hazel Rogers. Music by Richard Hageman. Associate Producer: Albert de Courville. Produced by Arnold Pressburger.

### Cast:

<i>Poppy</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Gene Tierney
<i>Sir Guy Charteris</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Walter Huston
<i>Doctor Omar</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Victor Mature
<i>"Mother" Gin Sling</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Ona Munson
<i>Chorus Girl (Dixie Pomeroy)</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Phyllis Brooks
<i>The Commissioner</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Albert Basserman
<i>The Amah</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Maria Ouspenskaya
<i>The Bookkeeper</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Eric Blore
<i>The Gambler</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Ivan Lebedoff
<i>The Coolie</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Mike Mazurki
<i>The Comprador</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Clyde Fillmore
<i>Counsellor Brooks</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Rex Evans
<i>The Social Leader</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Gracey Hampton
<i>The Bartender</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Michael Delmatoff
<i>The Croupier</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Marcel Dalio
<i>The Cashier</i>	...	...	...	...	...	Mikhail Rasumni
<i>The Escort</i>	...	...	...	...	...	John Abbott

*Synopsis:* Mother Gin Sling, Chinese head of a magnificent gambling casino in Shanghai, is about to be dispossessed by Sir Guy Charteris, whom she discovers was once her husband, who deserted her years before. She plans her long awaited revenge by giving a dinner party in his honour, in which she reveals his daughter, Poppy, to be in a state of moral degeneration. To Mother Gin Sling's surprise, Sir Guy informs her that Poppy is their daughter. Poppy denounces her mother, who then kills her in disgust.

Arnold Pressburger is credited with thinking first of a manner in which this well-known old shocker, which had served as a starring vehicle for both Florence Reed and Mrs. Leslie Carter on the stage, might be brought to the screen without being banned by the Hays Office. For years even the title had been forbidden by the Hollywood self-censorship organization. The house of ill-repute in the original was changed to a gambling establishment, Mother Goddam's name was changed to "Gin Sling", and she was now formerly "married" to Sir Guy, and all intimations that Poppy was a dope-fiend were removed. Though von Sternberg and several of his former writers collaborated on the shooting script, the addition of the character of Doctor Omar was, of course, von Sternberg's idea. For the first time a male character similar to his female exotics was developed by von Sternberg. The role of this Levantine sensualist of shady origins was admirably portrayed by Victor Mature under von Sternberg's close direction; the casting proved to be quite perfect. One remembers the revealing devices used to establish the nature of Dr. Omar, particularly the scene in which he is discovered reading, sunken luxuriously amid an enormous pile of pillows. The other members of the cast fit into the story perfectly; they all seemed to relish their colourful roles. Ona Munson, fresh from her success as Belle Watling in *Gone With The Wind*, managed effectively to suggest much of the bitterness of Mother Gin Sling. Gene Tierney, in one of her earliest starring roles, has seldom looked more beautiful, nor acted better than under von Sternberg's guidance in a demanding role. Veteran character actors Walter Huston and Albert Basserman were themselves, and Phyllis Brooks gave a perfect portrayal of the chorus girl from Flatbush, another addition to the original.

Pictorially *The Shanghai Gesture* was one of von Sternberg's most interesting efforts. The richly atmospheric opening scenes in the Chinese street reminded one, inevitably, of *Shanghai Express*. In the modern Chinese setting of the casino a new striving toward simplicity was apparent. The main action of the film, photographed against this background,

proved to be an unusually beautiful study in contrasting chiaroscuro. The close-ups of the actors, often against a plain white background with, at the most, one Oriental vase or bas-relief visible, achieved at times an effect of studied isolation. Miss Munson's elaborate Chinese wigs appeared to particular advantage in the close-ups, with their bringing-to-mind of Medusa's coils. As a unified whole the film suffered from too much dialogue. Nevertheless, von Sternberg managed surprisingly well to imbue the continuity with a considerable amount of purely filmic movement. Particularly effective were several of the more dramatic scenes played to a definite rhythm in a stylised manner. The constant return to the huge roulette table in the centre of the circular casino, giving the effect of being a descent into a maelstrom of iniquity, served as a suggestive pictorial leitmotif throughout the film. If the film seemed a little "old-fashioned" to many in 1941, it was only by comparison with the stereotyped nature of the majority of films contemporaneous to it; the individual statement seemed like an anachronism. Withal, the film was a financial success.

During the war von Sternberg was engaged by the Office of War Information to make a documentary film for distribution overseas:

#### THE TOWN. (1943-44)

Directed by Josef von Sternberg. Written by Joseph Krumgold. Photographed by Larry Madison. Phillip Dunn in charge of production for the United States Office of War Information. *The Town*: Madison, Indiana.

This short, one-reel documentary attempted to show the many elements that go into the making of a typical, democratic American town. The influence of von Sternberg was mostly noticeable in several of the photographic compositions, and in the lighting of some of the interiors, which emerged rather distinctively, standing apart from the more ordinary quality of the whole. Von Sternberg later commented that a documentary film apparently had to avoid good lighting even when it was there waiting for the director, as it had been established that a documentary had to be completely "sober", a factor originally resulting from the restrictive conditions under which the documentarist is most often forced to work. The latter is particularly applicable to most documentary interior photography (documentary exterior photography, on the contrary, has most often been extremely artful, especially in those works wherein lyrical qualities predominate<sup>14</sup>, usually accomplished without the complex but controllable lighting equipment of the studio. Regarded as a whole, the main fault with *The Town* was that it attempted to show too much in its short length, and thus suffered from a lack of intimacy and closeness to its subject, although the fact that the film was released in a shortened version undoubtedly contributed to this.

In 1946 von Sternberg acted as photographic consultant to David O. Selznick on his production, *Duel In The Sun*. During the early part of 1947 von Sternberg taught a first semester class in film direction (theoretical) at the Cinema Department of the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. In 1948 he left Hollywood for New York.

\* \* \* \* \*

"The silent film was the only international language. . . . The grafting of dialogue to the film balked efforts to internationalize the people via the screen. . . . I am planning a new film, a re-statement of the idea to show what constitutes national differences and how peoples can be fused by a common understanding of each other. It will be a serious subject, my greatest effort, though I expect it will be a thankless job. Still, as far as film goes, I am determined to pierce through its piffle with this attempt. Films can be made cheaply . . . the idea is to 'trick the eye' . . . as painters do. Expensive details aren't any more necessary in film than details are in painting. . . .

"Though my films have been, and still are, studied by directors here and abroad, I regard them only as reasonably arrogant gestures of mine. They were very often only protests against other films of the time. . . . Frequently they were attempts to investigate techniques which might broaden their appeal. They don't carry my endorsement, they only carry my name. None of them, save *The Salvation Hunters*, my first film, were sincere works of art. . . . I hope that my new film will be my maturest work by far. At any rate, I hope it will have nothing to do with any work I have ever done before".— JOSEF VON STERNBERG, in an interview with Herman G. Weinberg, July, 1948.

<sup>14</sup> *Vide*, Flaherty's films.

Published by SIGHT AND SOUND, the International Film Review, published by the British Film Institute, 164 Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W.C.2, England, and Printed by M<sup>o</sup>Corquodale & Co. Ltd., London, England.

